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Social Climate in the Environment of Primary Schools

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Abstract

The topic of this research survey is exploring the social climate in the environment of the elementary primary schools and alternative schools. School climate has an impact on social behaviour of pupil, their motivation to learn and learning outcomes. We can expect in favourable climate an increase of school effectiveness and mainly therefore the researches of school climate have been recently in the last period of accentuated category. At alternative schools a priori presumes positive atmosphere based on not only interrelations among children and teachers but also it is built on activating educational environment and mutual cooperation. Are these above mentioned characters really the only exclusive concern of alternative schools? Or do they become a common part of standard schools? In this case we present results of pilot study where we try to find differences between perception of climate in classrooms of standard primary school and in classrooms of alternative schools. This is a quantitative comparable survey where a revised version of standardized questionnaire MCI (My Class Inventory, by B. J. Fraser, D. L. Fisher) was used and adapted for Czech environment (by J. Mareš, J. Lašek). In the second part of the research we were interested in whether the educational environment contributes to the perception of positive climate – thinking in relation with unconventional methods and forms of teaching if there are any differences in the area of using unconventional methods and forms of work among standard schools and alternative schools.

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1. Introduction

The classroom climate is characterised by a steady process of experiencing, perception and evaluation of what happens in the class. This social climate is made by all actors of school teaching and is never created by itself. We

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talk about a long term phenomenon which is influenced by regulations, rules, organisation and hierarchy. Each school and class environment is characterised by specific conditions which are defined in educational theory as ecological dimension, formal dimension, social dimension and cultural dimension. These dimensions represent objective reality which is reflected in subjective experiencing. And therefore in some way they are perceived, described and evaluated by pupils, teachers and parents. Social climate is mainly created by what relationships between people are, how they behave to each other and how they act. In the structure of each institution the responsibility and duties are somehow divided, rating system works and this is reflected in the individual feedback of experiencing (Mareš, Ježek, 2012):

- All groups of actors have certain opinion on class climate, it is so called a group phenomenon;
- It is created by individual experience of actors, based on relationships and communication, it is socially constructed;
- It is socially shared.

In the introduction of this pilot study we presume a brief clarification of the other examined factors to be important. In term of standard school we understand schools representing majority established standards, a certain standard. We define alternative schools in accordance with Průcha (2004) as schools which somehow differ from a standard in a certain way (e.g. in selected methods of teaching, in evaluation methods etc.).

2. Theoretical background

Teaching, behaviour and motivation of pupils is influenced by micro social environment therefore mainly by school class environment. This is a specific social psychological variable which is created by pupils, groups of pupils and teachers of a specific class. Such variable is so called as social climate of a school class. Carolyn S. Anderson (2013) was devoted to analyse school climate literature and while the study of more than 200 links she point out at the difficulty with defining climate of school and a class according to the diversity of climatic typologies, diversity of experts' views and also according to many variables which tend to interfere in the research context. Social climate is a set of generalized concepts, emotional perception and pupils' response, the ability to perceive processes which happen at school being a subjective view. By this way so called "hidden curriculum" is being created and influences the effectiveness of education that has been a subject of interest of educational and psychological research in last years.

Soon after curricular changes in our educational system of the Czech Republic there have been several researches dedicated to investigate climate of school classes (Škaloudová, 1992; Lašek, 1994; Košťálová, 1994; In Čáp, J., Mareš, J., 2001), but unlike foreign researches (Young, I., Williams, T., 1989 – 1991; Cangelosi, J. B., 2000) there are a few survey studies focused on this issue in home scientific literature. Apart from investigation of social class climate it is necessary important to know what the educational environment is and if this environment differs in common and alternative schools and if yes so what specifically? In the year 1996 there was a study made at Faculty of Education, University of Ostrava in the Czech Republic (Kurelová, M., Hanzelková, M., In Průcha, 2004), that found differences in social climate of school with traditional and alternative teaching. In alternative class there was higher solidarity and satisfaction found on the other hand in standard schools higher competitiveness and frictions among pupils were found. Extensive survey was made by M. Linková (2001), and investigated psycho-social climate in school classes of the 1st grade of Prague primary schools (standard schools and alternative schools). No significant differences were found between both types of classes in characterised climate only the characteristic of "friction" showed slight higher values in standard classes. In the year 2001 there was a research study made which compared social climate in school classes of 2nd grade of primary schools at standard schools with the school climate of educational programme *Zdravá škola v České republice* (Healthy school in the Czech Republic). The authors of that study M. Havlíková and M. Kolář further investigated relationship between the quality of social climate in teaching with the occurrence of bullying in class and at school. The study results (4088 respondents) showed that at schools with educational programme

Zdravá škola (Healthy School) were in most indicators socially safer climate than at standard schools. Further found that the experience of pupils with bullying in the class environment and school is in direct relationship with climate perception and also how they work in the classroom (Havlinová, M., Kolář, M., 2001). Finally, there is a relationship between classroom climate and atmosphere of the school, while a reflection of the atmosphere can be cooperation between the school and families (Pecháčková, Havigerová et al., 2012).

The diagnosis of social climate can be investigated by observation of teacher's and pupils' activities (tuition-ethnographic approach), by the use of questionnaires (e.g. sociometric-rating questionnaire SORAD) and assessment scales or self-evaluation of social climate that is not based on any standardized method. For our research investigation we have chosen a questionnaire MCI (My Class Inventory, by B. J. Fraser, D. L. Fisher; revised version for Czech environment: J. Mareš, J. Lašek, 1996), that is focused on measurement of social climate in 3rd up to 6th class of primary school.

3. Method

3.1. Research objectives

The aim in the first part of the research investigation is to find out the quality of five indicators of social climate in classrooms at primary school and to compare with each other in selected indicators standard schools with alternative schools. In the second part of the climate research of a school class we focus on finding out differences in the area of unconventional methods and forms of work among standard schools and alternative schools. There is specification of goals mentioned below:

Goals of the first part of the research:

- Determine the quality of social climate by analysis of the questionnaire results Our class (questionnaire MCI) on the base of five variables from the pupils' view.

Goals of the second part of the research:

- Determine if there are existing differences in the area of educational environment (the use unconventional methods or forms of work) among common schools and alternative schools.
- Investigate the influence of educational environment towards social climate of the classroom.

Within the research there have been provided the following conditions:

- In indicators of social climate of school class there will not be found any significant differences among standard schools and alternative schools.
- In indicators of competitiveness in school class will be found important differences among common schools and alternative schools.
- In the use of unconventional methods and forms of work in teaching there will not be found any significant differences among standard schools and alternative schools.
- Educational environment (meant in relation with methods and forms of teaching) has impact on experiencing positive climate.

3.2. Research methodology

This is a quantitative comparable investigation where a revised version of standardized questionnaire MCI (My Class Inventory, by B. J. Fraser, D. L. Fisher) was used. It is modified for Czech environment (by: J. Mareš, J. Lašek). This questionnaire is intended for pupils of 3rd up to 6th class of primary schools, identifies their subjective view at classroom climate and measures characteristics of five variables: satisfaction in the class, friction in the class, competitiveness in the class, difficulty learning and class solidarity. The version contains 25 items, minimalizes pupils' tiredness while filling and the version of each question task is simplified. Possible

answers are reduced to response type “Yes – Ne“. It can detect current climate and preferred. According to our research objective we have used current form of a questionnaire. In the second stage of research unstandardized questionnaire of own construction for teachers will be used to detect the use of unconventional methods and forms of work in teaching.

3.3. Research group

The research group is created by pupils of 1st grade standard and alternative primary schools, specifically pupils of 5th classes. Representative sample differed from schools distributions divided into alternative schools. These schools were assigned by standard type schools according to locality, size and type of residence. Representativeness of the sample is based on balanced alternative and standard schools' representation according to the type and school size and residence in the average number of pupils. The research is currently implemented by five standard and five alternative schools in the Czech Republic whereas the presumed number of respondent are 250 pupils.

Up to this date there have been 86 questionnaires processed from four 5th classes (age 10 – 11), concretely 54 questionnaires from standard primary school and 32 questionnaires from alternative school (Table 1).

Table 1. Research group

Standard school	Number of pupils	Alternative school	Number of pupils
5th. class	26	5th. class	15
5th. class	28	5th. class	17
Total	54	Total	32

4. Results

Results that are listed in this pilot study represent current status of subjective view on class climate of pupils from 5th.class of standard and alternative school. There are measured characteristics of these five variables: satisfaction in a classroom, frictions in a classroom, competitiveness in a classroom, difficulty with learning and class solidarity. Results from 54 pupils of 5th classes of standard primary school, which had questionnaire MCI – current form, presented in table 2. Table No. 3 presents current status of subjective view of 32 pupils of 5th classes of alternative school.

Table 2. Results MCI – A, standard school

Variables	Arithmetic mean	Range of common values
Satisfaction	11,79	9,6 – 12,1
Friction	9,48	9,3 – 9,7
Competitiveness	10,87	10,8 – 10,9
Difficulty	8,94	8,7 – 8,9
Solidarity	9,57	8,5 – 8,7

Table 3. Results MCI – A, alternative school

Variables	Arithmetic mean	Range of common values
Satisfaction	12,50	12,0 – 13,0
Friction	10,03	9,6 – 10,4
Competitiveness	8,37	8,1 - 8,6
Difficulty	7,46	7,0 – 7,82
Solidarity	9,06	9,0 – 9,2

When comparing basic characteristics of research groups regarding fifth year of primary schools which are situated in town with population 10 000 inhabitants. Both of these research samples have comparable number of pupils in terms of school size not in terms of number of pupils in a classroom that might influence the results. Furthermore there has not been found any significant difference in school profiling (subject composition), or a number of offered club activities. However we assume the sample groups will differ in educational environment specifically in teachers' approach in teaching and in the selection of organizational forms and teaching methods which might be expected in school focus (standard versus alternative). This educational dimension and its possible impact on class climate will be identified in the second part of the research.

Table 4. Comparison of results

Variables	Arithmetic mean	Arithmetic mean
	Standard school	Alternative school
Satisfaction	11,79	12,50
Friction	9,48	10,03
Competitiveness	10, 87	8,37
Difficulty	8,94	7,46
Solidarity	9,57	9,06

In the table 4 there are compared differences between experiencing the pupils' climate from a standard and an alternative school. It is evident from the table that pupils from alternative school (in comparison with pupils from standard school) feel lower competitiveness, less difficulty working, higher satisfaction but surprisingly they have more frictions, and they show lower solidarity.

5. Conclusion

We hypothesized that in indicators of social climate will not be found any significant differences between standard and alternative schools and further will be differences in indicators of competitiveness recorded (lower competitiveness at alternative schools). First studies show differences between monitored schools and higher competitiveness at standard schools. However these results of low number of respondents cannot be generalized. In the second part of the research we will be interested in whether educational environment is in the direct relationship with the climate perception.

The achieved level of processing provides us with background of presentation of this study and is a starting point for further data processing with the help of mathematical-statistical analysis.

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